

CBS EVENING NEWS
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LEBANON/U.S.
EMBASSY ATTACK

MARTIN: CBS News has learned that earlier this month, U.S. intelligence obtained hard evidence that a terrorist attack like this was being planned and that it was being done with the help of the Iranian government. According to informed sources, U.S. intelligence found out that Iran was shipping hundreds of pounds of explosives through Syria to Iranian terrorists in Lebanon. One source said the U.S. did not try to stop the shipment for fear of endangering the lives of these three Americans, including U.S. diplomat William Buckley, kidnapped by terrorists in Beirut earlier this year. A second source said the U.S. could not have acted in any event, because the intelligence did not specify how or when the explosives were being shipped. Both sources agreed that the intelligence was picked up at about the same time terrorists were publicly threatening to attack Americans. JOHN HUGHES (State Department spokesman): The news agency received a telephone message in Beirut on, ah, Sept. 8. Ah, the caller claimed to be a representative of the Islamic Jihad organization, ah, threatened that the organization would strike very shortly at a key American interest in the Middle East.

MARTIN: The American veto of a United Nations resolution demanding that Israel ease its occupation of Lebanon triggered the Sept. 8 threat. The State Department sent out a special advisory to be on the alert for a terrorist attack. Sources say the Beirut embassy responded with a cable agreeing that the terrorist threat was very high. Nevertheless, the explosives-laden van got within 20 feet of the embassy annex. U.S. officials claimed the security precautions at least prevented a death toll like those from earlier terrorist attacks in Beirut.

GEORGE SHULTZ (secretary of State): In this case, our measures at least did not have that, ah, car penetrate the building the way it did, ah, before.

MARTIN: But some members of Congress still said security was lax. THOMAS P. O'NEILL (speaker of the House): Looks as though it's a repeat of, ah, what happened to our 261 Marines, and we should have been prepared.

MARTIN: Following last October's massacre at the Marine compound in Beirut, the Pentagon drew up a list of targets to be hit in retaliation for future terrorist attacks. But U.S. officials are not giving any hint of whether they intend to strike back this time. Defense Secretary Weinberger said only, 'All appropriate measures are under consideration.' Late today, Pentagon officials said the helicopter-carrier Shreveport, which had just completed an unsuccessful search for mines in the Gulf of Suez, is now on its way to Beirut. David Martin, CBS News, the Pentagon.